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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2009

In Today's Papers

A Call to Turkey in an Armenian Report (CNN Turk)
Media report the International Crisis Group issued a report recommending that Turkey "not miss the opportunity" to normalize relations with Armenia. Mainstream Milliyet reports in, "Don't Miss the Opportunity with Armenia," that the Brussels-based think tank "stressed the importance of supporting the normalization process with Armenia." Leftist Taraf calls the report "A 'Don't Miss This Opportunity' Recommendation to Turkey." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports "The ICG told Ankara to persuade Baku and to not miss out on the opportunity with Armenia," and the ICG report warned U.S. President Barack Obama "to be cautious."

In a related article, Milliyet headlines, "The Opposition Went, But the AKP Is Not Going to Baku," and notes, "parliamentarians from the CHP and MHP joined a meeting in Baku today on the topic of Turkey-Azerbaijan relations, but the AKP decided not to join," while the Head of the Turkey-Azerbaijan Friendship Group Mustafa Kabakci (of the ruling AKP) in parliament said "we didn't give any promises" and "the invitation was not addressed solely to me, but to the Turkey-Azerbaijan Friendship Group." Far right Ortadoğu reports "The AKP said 'yes' to Armenia and 'no' to its brother," and 'brother' here is referring to Azerbaijan. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports "After the tensions that developed last week, a group of Azeri women parliamentarians is in Ankara today for a very important visit," to "discuss bilateral relations with President Gul, Speaker of the Parliament Toptan, and other AKP party leaders."

Meanwhile, Leftist Taraf reports British outlet The Times commented "Opening the Turkey-Armenian border will cause Turkey to become a major power in the Caucasus and Central Asia," as "The last piece of the iron curtain is falling" because, "the ice is melting between Armenia and Turkey." Mainstream Star reports, "In a good will gesture to Armenia, Turkey will open the border with Armenia once per week" and this gate opening will mean that "Armenia can take a breath of relief for its economy."

Islamist-oriented Zaman reports in "Yerevan Abandons Territorial Claims," that "sources in Yerevan indicate Armenia will no longer seek territorial claims from Turkey" and "Yerevan has given the green light to setting up an historical commission to examine the events of 1915." Zaman adds "it will take years before the committee begins fully working after its establishment." But Zaman notes, "By agreeing to set up a committee of historians, Yerevan would have accepted that the events of 1915 constitute an 'historical problem' rather than a political or legal problem." An agreement between Turkey and Armenia will be announced in a third country, probably Switzerland, according to Zaman.

Gul, Baykal, Bahceli on Turkey-Armenia

Media outlets report that before departing for Bahrain on Tuesday, President Abdullah Gul spoke to reporters regarding Turkey's Armenia initiative. "It's not appropriate diplomatically to discuss these issues openly in front of the cameras. While we are talking to Armenians to resolve the differences, Turkey is also working toward a resolution to the problems between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Our desire is stability in the Caucasus," said Gul.

Addressing his party group yesterday, the main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal blamed the ruling AKP for making "some promises behind the curtains" on Armenia. "They tell us to open the border. If we open the border, the Armenian occupation of Nagorno Karabakh will gain legitimacy. How can those ruling Turkey accept that?" asked Baykal. Baykal stressed Turkey "must be in solidarity with Azerbaijan," noting that "energy cooperation could be jeopardized if the border with Armenia opens."

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Opposition far right MHP chairman Devlet Bahceli said "No one has the power to open the border with Armenia unless the allegations based on the genocide lie are given up, the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh is returned to Azerbaijan, and territorial claims over Turkey are abandoned." Bahceli claimed the normalization process with Armenia that began with President Gul's September visit to Yerevan reached a level making "unilateral concessions."

Anti-PKK Operations Detain 51 in 12 Provinces in Turkey

Media outlets report 51 people, including three pro-Kurdish DTP deputy provincial chairmen and three lawyers for Abdullah Ocalan, were taken into custody in 12 provinces, in operations initiated against the PKK by the Diyarbakir Prosecutor's Office. The prosecutor's office said the people detained were the members of the PKK's "Turkey Working Group" and were accused of "organizing and leading the illegal actions of the PKK in Turkey." Following a "technical pursuit" by police that lasted for one year, operations were staged on 57 places in 15 provinces --mostly in Diyarbakir. 51 people including three deputy chairmen of Democratic Society Party, or DTP, as well as three lawyers of Abdullah Ocalan, head of PKK terrorist organization, were taken into custody.

Turkey's main Kurdish party DTP Chairman Ahmet Turk said the operation was the "manifestation of the AKP government's intolerance to the local election results." "Our friends must be set free. The PKK's declaration of 'inaction' until June 1 is a good opportunity for Turkey," said Turk. The DTP deputy Emine Ayna said the operation was "very dangerous" and was "forcing people to seek ways other than politics" to address the Kurdish issue.

Basbug Delivers 'Historic' Speech

Media outlets report on Tuesday, the Chief of the military General Staff (TGS), General Ilker Basbug, issued "key messages" in his annual speech at the War Academy in Istanbul. Basbug said the responsibilities of the military leaders were important, emphasizing "the concerns and recommendations of the military should be taken into consideration by the civilian authority." "Of course, the final decision lies with the civilian authority. Politicians, however, would be responsible for any outcome that may emerge from a failure to consider the sincere and realistic recommendations made by the military." Basbug said "ill-intentioned groups" were carrying out smear campaigns to label the Turkish military as "anti-democratic and anti-religion." "The army is made up of our people, and it has the same sensitivities our people have," said

Basbug, adding the pious people in the country loved their army. In "We Cannot Remain Indifferent to Sects," mainstream Milliyet reports Basbug as saying "religious sects" organized around interest groups could not be called "non-governmental organization." "Some religious sects present themselves as a player in the democratic area, and that they have a strong position. Such a perception, however, is misleading," emphasized Basbug.

In "Surprise Opening," mainstream Sabah says that in his speech, Basbug put an emphasis on "the people of Turkey." Basbug said "The people of Turkey who founded the Republic of Turkey are called the Turkish nation." He noted the Turkish military was a "side" in the preservation of "nation-state" and "unitary state structures." Basbug also said the struggle against the outlawed PKK was "not an ethnic conflict." Basbug underlined the Kurds live together with the rest of the nation and share a common future, and denied that the state implemented "assimilation policy" against the Kurds. "There's nothing wrong with the Kurds asking to enjoy their cultural rights but the appeal of the secondary identity should not dominate our common and upper identity," Basbug said. Basbug said the "secondary identities," what he called "cultural freedoms," should be protected. "But we cannot create new upper identities or minorities. Otherwise we'll find ourselves in the position of Iraq, Lebanon and some Balkan countries," he said.

Basbug described President Obama's praise for the Turkish model as something more than an effort to win the sympathy of Turks, saying

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it was actually an "attempt to solve the problems of the U.S. in the international arena." "Secularism is the fundamental pillar of the founding philosophy of Turkey. A modern republic can only be possible with democracy," said Basbug. On the PKK and the problem of terror, Basbug said the "state must do some changes, with better implementation of the existing legal arrangements, in a way to separate the mountain cadres of the PKK from the organization." "Terrorists are human beings too," said Basbug. "For us the important things is to capture them alive and bring them to justice."

Editorial Commentary on General Basbug's Speech

Erdal Safak wrote in mainstream Sabah: " In his speech, General Basbug highlighted issues regarding counterterrorism, democracy, secularism and civilian-military ties. He said 'the state should take measures to prevent people from joining the terrorist organization. Arrangements should be made in the existing laws in order to divide the terrorist organization PKK.' With these realistic and brave comments, General Basbug made the politicians' jobs easier. I hope they will take Basbug's passing ball and score a goal."

Taha Akyol wrote in mainstream Milliyet: " Basbug's remarks showed us all a new intellectual approach from the military."

Fikret Bila wrote in Milliyet: "General Basbug gave warm messages to religious people and to Kurds, but rather harsh messages to religious sects for presenting themselves as though they are part of democratic life."

Hikmet Cetinkaya wrote in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet: "General Basbug pulled the masks off the Fethullah Gulen supporters' faces by saying 'some religious sects are trying to shape our socio-political life.' FG supporters view the military as the greatest obstacle to their ability to assume the most important positions of power in Turkey."

Mehmet Yilmaz wrote in Islamist-oriented Zaman: General Basbug, in his speech yesterday, focused so much on domestic issues and home-security that he failed to mention global issues such as Israel's harsh policies, Iran's nuclear program, security problems in Iraq, NATO's mission, and the request for additional troops to Afghanistan. All these issues are the military's responsibility and are all about Turkey's security."

Ismet Berkan wrote in liberal Radikal: "In his speech yesterday,

General Basbug stressed openly that the Turkish military respects the constitution, the rule of law and democracy. His remarks regarding the religious sects reflected the military's open distaste for the Fethullah Gulen community."

Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak: "General Basbug delivered a positive speech yesterday in order to avoid tensions. He touched political issues only through security issues.

Even though it will be wrong to call this "a new era" for the military, we can definitely note there are new balances in the military. Nevertheless, in democratic countries TGS Chiefs do not deliver such ceremonial speeches via live TV broadcast. Moreover, in democratic countries, such speeches have no impact on political balances."

Baykal, Bahceli Criticize Latest 'Ergenekon' Detentions

Media outlets report rising reactions to Monday's police searches at the offices of the Organization to Support Contemporary Life (CYDD) and at the house of the CYDD chairperson Professor Turkan Saylan, a respected figure of secular women in Turkey who has been helping girls to continue their education by giving monthly allowances to 36,000 students. Saylan's personal documents were seized in her house.

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The main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal strongly criticized the latest wave of arrests made in the controversial 'Ergenekon' case. "This is terror, this is a coup d'etat," said Baykal. "Coups are not always made by tanks, rifles and troops. This is a coup by the ruling AKP. In fact, it is also a coup by the prosecutors," Baykal told a meeting of his party group at the parliament. Baykal said the Ergenekon case has been turned into a "symbol of horror." "No one knows why members of the CYDD, the Baskent University Rector Mehmet Haberal and other rectors were detained, or why the house of Turkan Saylan was searched," emphasized Baykal. Opposition MHP leader Devlet Bahceli said Turkey's laws were being "abused for political purposes." "There's concern that the laws are being abused for political gain as well for oppressing people," said Bahceli.

The Taliban Strikes Again in Afghanistan, Wins Zerdari's Approval for Sharia Law in Pakistan's Svat Region

Media outlets note the Taliban is not going away - in fact their influence is clearly on the rise throughout Afghanistan and Pakistan. Secularist outlets, in particular, pay attention to the Taliban's cold-blooded murder of a newly wedded couple in Afghanistan, along with Pakistan's decision to allow the Taliban to practice Sharia law in the Svat region. Islamist outlets refrain from commenting on these developments. Mainstream Milliyet reports in, "Pakistan is Becoming Talibanized," that "Washington is in shock" because the U.S. sees the peace accord between Pakistan and the Taliban as "undermining democracy and human rights." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet headlines, "Zerdari Approves Sharia Law in Svat." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports in "A Taliban Lesson to Lovers," that "a young couple in Afghanistan was murdered by the Taliban after they were married," and "they eloped because the young wife's parents did not approve of her marriage." CNN Turk reports in "Taliban Savagery" that "these two were lined up for a lesson" from the Taliban.

Obama Extends A Hand to Cuba, Castro Complains It's Not Enough

Media outlets comment that U.S. President Barack Obama is changing the U.S. approach to Cuba, but Fidel Castro is still trying to call the shots. Far right Ortadogu headlines "Castro Wants a Lifting of the Blockade, not More Donations." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet headlines, "Cuba Doesn't Want Alms," and "Fidel Castro criticized the revised U.S. policy for not promising to lift the blockade." Liberal Radikal headlines "An Obama Hand to Cuba," and reports that Cuba "wants an end to isolation." Mainstream Sabah reports "A 47-Year Old Law is Lifted," as "families are pleased that the travel restrictions have been lifted" but "Fidel Castro says 'We don't want the blockade.'"

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- An F-16 training jet that took off from its base in the western province of Balikesir crashed in the neighboring province of Bursa. The pilot could not be found in the wreckage site.
- Turkey's budget deficit skyrocketed in the first three months of 2009, increasing by 337 percent up to 19.1 billion TL. The deficit was 8.7 billion TL in March.
- Turkey's Treasury Undersecretariat said Tuesday the net international direct investments in Turkey went down 67.1 percent to USD 366 million in February over the same month of 2008, which were USD 1.1 billion in January.
- The German experts brought to Turkey by the far right BPP determine that the March helicopter crash which killed party leader Muhsin Yazicioglu was caused by "adverse weather conditions."

World

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- The Jerusalem Post reports the US and Israel will hold their largest joint missile defense drills later this year, testing three anti-ballistic missile defense systems.
- Iranian President Ahmadinejad says Iran plans to launch another satellite into space despite concerns in the West over the launch of Iran's first domestically made satellite in February.
- Prior to the April 19 general elections in Turkish Cyprus, 'President' Mehmet Ali Talat traveled to Washington to meet with Secretary Clinton on Thursday.
- North Korea orders International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors out of the country.

JEFFREY